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Dayna R Robison 09/20/2006 11:18:48 AM From DB/Inbox: Dayna R Robison

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 VIENNA 002625

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 01, 2006

Greens Kick off Election Campaign

11. The Green Party began its election campaign in Vienna on Thursday with a series of attacks on the OeVP and Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel. Party leader Alexander Van der Bellen said reforms were desperately needed in the education and training sectors, and accused the Chancellor of denying some serious problems needed to be addressed. Greens deputy-leader Eva Glawischnig said the OeVP's policies were anti-women. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung quotes the Greens leaders Alexander Van der Bellen and Eva Glawischnig as stressing they are "campaigning against the OeVP's delusions of grandeur," and say they "want to send the current government packing" with the help of the Austrian women's votes, who make up 52,6 percent of the electorate. Van der Bellen also said his party would push for a "one-billion-Euro reform of the country's education and job training systems," and harshly attacked OeVP Education Minister Elisabeth Gehrler. Glawischnig meanwhile emphasized the dire need for better chances for women, saying they needed to be "given priority in all areas of life."

Election Outcome Open again

12. An Austrian daily publishes a survey by polling institute Gallup, which suggests the outcome of the October 1 general election is all but clear. According to the Gallup survey published in newly established daily Oesterreich, the OeVP is currently at 37 percent of the votes, followed closely by the SPOe with 35 percent. The Greens would get 11 percent of the votes at this point, and the FPÖe seven percent. The BZÖe and maverick MEP Heinz-Peter Martin's party HPM are ranked last, both with about 4 percent of the votes. In addition, a SPOE-Greens coalition is becoming increasingly popular among Austrians: 18 percent say this was their preferred government combination. With 39 percent of support, an OeVP-SPOe grand coalition remains the most popular coalition choice.

Mild Verdict for Policemen

13. Four members of the elite Vienna police unit WEGA have been found guilty of torturing and seriously injuring Bakary J., a Gambian asylum seeker, earlier this year. Three police officers received eight month suspended sentences, the fourth six months suspension, according to a report in independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten. In a surprise turn on Wednesday the accused had pleaded guilty to the charges. Bakary J. was awarded 3,000 euros in damages. There was harsh criticism of the sentencing from Amnesty International (AI). The head of AI-Austria Heinz Patzelt said torture was effectively being treated as a petty crime.

Bawag Fallout

14. The Austrian Unions Association (OeGB) says it will file for damages against its former president Fritz Verzetnitsch following the affair over union-owned bank Bawag. In an interview with economics weekly Format, the head of the OeGB's Social Democratic faction, Wilhelm Haberzettl, did not name the sum the organization would sue for.

Austria Has New Daily

15. As of today, Oesterreich, a new daily newspaper is being published in Austria, bringing the total number of papers for sale in Austria to 17. The daily's editor in chief is long-time media tycoon Wolfgang Fellner, who also published mass-circulation weekly News and monthly magazine Woman.

Iran Ignores Deadline

16. The UN's nuclear watchdog says Iran has ignored a Security Council call to stop its uranium enrichment program, opening the way for possible sanctions. Iran has dismissed the report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, saying it will continue to pursue its nuclear activities. The US says the report contains ample justification for concern that Iran intends to produce nuclear weapons. Washington is therefore pushing for rapid sanctions against the mullah regime, but Russia and China are expected to oppose such

a move. Newly established Austrian daily Oesterreich believes Iran's defiance is going to tighten the "noose of sanctions around Iran's neck."

The daily's foreign editor Gerhard Plott comments: "Ahmadinejad is banking on disagreement in the Security Council. Russia and China would block the threatened sanctions against Iran, he believes. But to believe is not the same as to know, which is why Ahmadinejad could be terribly wrong. Neither Moscow, nor Beijing have any interest whatsoever in an atomic bomb in the hands of the mullah regime. It will take some huge diplomatic efforts now to forge an alliance with the two countries in order to get the confused man in Tehran back on the right track. The match Ahmadinejad has put to the powder keg must be put out."

Stockholm Conference Pledges Lebanon Aid

17. International donors meeting in Stockholm have pledged more than 940 million dollars in immediate reconstruction aid for Lebanon. The sum is nearly double the targeted amount. Lebanese Premier Fuad Siniora has meanwhile promised the international community that the financial aid to be provided will not end up in the hands of radical Islamic group Hezbollah. Conference participants will turn their attention to the Palestinian territories today, where aid was cut off earlier this year after the election of Hamas into government. Newly established daily Oesterreich publishes an interview with Hezbollah spokesperson Dr. Bilal Naim, who emphasizes that the organization considers itself the winner in the recent conflict: "The entire world was against us, but we are the winners now. Israeli Premier Olmert has failed to reach his goals," namely the "destruction and disarmament of Hezbollah, and driving the organization out of southern Lebanon. And of course, liberating the kidnapped Israeli soldiers." Regarding the consequences for Hezbollah, he said: "Everyone in the Arab world had a problem with Israel's power. Hezbollah has shown everyone that we can beat Israel." Dr. Bilal also underscored that "no army in the world can disarm Hezbollah. You have to know the nature of Hezbollah, the nature of Islamic resistance. Each and every one of us is part of Lebanese society. There is no military base, no headquarters for this resistance." Hezbollah "will not disarm as long as Israel exists and poses a threat."

California Passes Emission Laws

18. The state of California has become the first in the nation to pass a bill to cap greenhouse gas emissions blamed for global warming. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, frustrated by the lack of action on the part of the Bush administration, teamed up with the state's Democratic majority on the landmark legislation. The state wants to reduce emissions by 25 percent by the year 2020. A recent report suggested the measure would add 60 billion dollars to the state's economy and create 17,000 jobs every year. Experts believe the move has considerably increased Schwarzenegger's chances at being re-elected as governor, ORF online news writes. Indeed, recent polls seem to indicate Schwarzenegger's chances for the November election have increased again: Currently, 49 percent of Californians say they their governor is doing a good job, while in June 47 percent of the state's voting population said they do not want Schwarzenegger re-elected as governor. ORF online news also notes that this is the second time the California governor has actively opposed US President Bush's policy: In June, Schwarzenegger dismissed Bush's call for a deployment of additional National Guard troops to the United States' borders with Mexico.

UN Troops for Darfur

19. The UN Security Council has voted to create a peacekeeping force in Sudan's Darfur region to avert a new humanitarian disaster, says independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten. It wants to deploy 17,300 soldiers to the crisis-ridden region, but the Khartoum government has rejected the resolution as illegal, warning it would not let the soldiers into the country.

No End to Violence in Iraq

110. A series of explosions, which devastated homes in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, has left more than 60 people dead and wounded over 1250. The United States has meanwhile expanded its force in Iraq by 15,000 to 140,000 troops. US President Bush has meanwhile ruled out an early American withdrawal from the country, claiming such a move would turn Iraq into a terrorist state even more dangerous than Afghanistan under Taleban rule. Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung quotes the US President as stressing Iraq left to its own devices would be particularly dangerous, because the country could tap into its huge oil reserves to finance terrorist activities. According to ORF online news, George Bush denies there are any indications of a civil war in Iraq, despite the recent surge of violence there. In fact, only "a small number of Iraqis" was involved in the religious-motivated violence. The US was fighting the decisive "ideological battle of the 21st century" against the successors of "Fascists, Nazis, and Communists" in Iraq, the US President said. McCaw